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George Croghan: Frontier
Soldier.

(1753)

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY





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George Croghan

Frontier Soldier

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY



GEORGE CROGHAN

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GEORGE CROGHAN

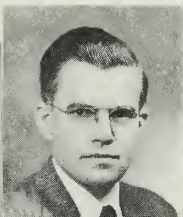
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FOREWORD

Ill. Hist. Survey

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George Croghan, an officer in the War of 1812, typifies the patriotism, the bravery, and the gallantry of the young American of that period. At the age of twenty-one, he was in temporary command of the garrison at Fort Wayne for a brief time.

His excellent record in the defense of Fort Defiance and Fort Meigs earned him the command of Fort Stephenson (the present site of Fremont, Ohio). His intelligent and valorous defense of the fort against overwhelming odds touched the imaginations and thrilled the hearts of the American people. His later life was uneventful; he served as United States postmaster at New Orleans and as inspector general in the regular army. He saw action under General Taylor in the Mexican War and died of cholera in New Orleans in 1849.

The following account of Croghan's early life, compiled by a woman who had known him as a boy, appeared in the supplement appended to Volume VII of the NILES' WEEKLY REGISTER. The Boards and the Staff of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County reprint this biographical sketch in the hope that it will prove interesting and entertaining to students of local history. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation have been changed to conform to current usage.

Frankfort, Kentucky

July 22, 1814

Sir:

Upon receiving the letter which you addressed to me, I immediately took such measures as were necessary to procure the information you requested. I now transmit to you the result of my inquiries, regretting that it was not in my power to do it sooner.

At the time when Colonel Croghan and I were inmates of the same house, he was in his fourteenth year. No incident occurred during that early period sufficiently interesting to find a place in his history; yet even then, his conduct exhibited a happy combination of those talents and principles which have already procured for him the admiration and gratitude of his country.

Though ingenuous in his disposition and unassuming and conciliating in his manner, he was remarkable for discretion and steadiness. His opinions, when once formed, were maintained with modest but persevering firmness; and the propriety of his decisions generally justified the spirit with which they were defended. Yet, though rigid in his adherence to principle and in his estimate of what was right or improper, in cases of minor importance he was all compliance. I never met a youth who would so cheerfully sacrifice every personal gratification for the wishes or accommodations of his friends. In sickness and disappointment he evinced patience and fortitude which could not have been exceeded by any veteran in the schools of misfortune or philosophy. If I were asked to name the most prominent features of his character, or, rather, the prevailing dispositions of his mind at this period, I

should answer, decision and urbanity; the former resulted from the uncommon and estimable qualities of his understanding, and the latter came from the concentration of all the "sweet charities of life" in his heart.

I have seldom seen Colonel Croghan during the last eight years; but I subjoin the testimony of those who have observed him during that whole period. An intelligent young gentleman who was his associate in study and in arms has given me the following brief sketch of Colonel Croghan's military career. I am transmitting his account together with such corroborative and additional facts as I have collected from other sources.

"Lieutenant Colonel George Croghan was born at Locust Grove, Kentucky, near the Falls of the Ohio, on November 15, 1791. His father, Major William Croghan, left Ireland at an early period of his life; he was appointed an officer in the Revolutionary Army and discharged his duties to the satisfaction of the commander in chief. His mother is the daughter of John Clark, Esq., of Virginia. His maternal grandfather was a gentleman of worth and respectability; he exerted himself and contributed towards the support of our just and glorious contest with Great Britain. John Clark had five sons, four of whom were officers in the Revolutionary Army. William, together with Captain Lewis, explored the Louisiana Purchase lands and is at present governor of the Missouri Territory. He was too young to participate with his brothers in the achievement of our liberties. His conduct since has been a sufficient demonstration of the part he would have taken had he been riper in years. The military talents of another son, George R. Clark, have obtained for him the flattering appellation of 'the Father of the Western Country.'

"Colonel Croghan has always been esteemed generous and humane. When



.....ADMIRER OF THE WRITINGS OF SHAKESPEARE.....

he was a boy, his manly appearance and independence of thought and action commanded the attention and admiration of all who knew him. The selection of his speeches for scholastic exercises tended in some measure to mark his peculiar talent and were of an entirely military nature. He read with delight whatever pertained to military affairs and listened for hours to conversations dealing with battles. His principal amusements were gunning and fox hunting. He would frequently rise at twelve o'clock at night and would repair to the woods alone (or accompanied only by his little servant), either to give chase to the fox or to battle with the wildcat and the raccoon. Nothing offended him more than for anyone, even in jest, to say a word disrespectful of Washington.

"While in Kentucky, his time was principally occupied with the studies of his native tongue, geography, the elements of geometry, and the Latin and Greek languages. In these different branches of knowledge he made a respectable progress.

"In 1808, he left Locust Grove for the purpose of prosecuting his studies in William and Mary College. He graduated from this institution with a Bachelor of Arts degree on July 4, 1810; on that day he delivered an oration on the subject of expatriation. This oration was deemed by the audience to be concise, ingenious, and argumentative, and it was delivered in a manner which did great credit to his oratorical powers. During the ensuing summer he attended a course of lectures on law, and upon the termination of the course, he returned to his father's home. Here he prosecuted the study of law and occasionally indulged in miscellaneous reading. Biography and history have always occupied much of his attention. He is an enthusiastic admirer of the writings of Shakespeare and can recite most of the noted passages of that great poet and philosopher. He admires tragedy but not comedy. He

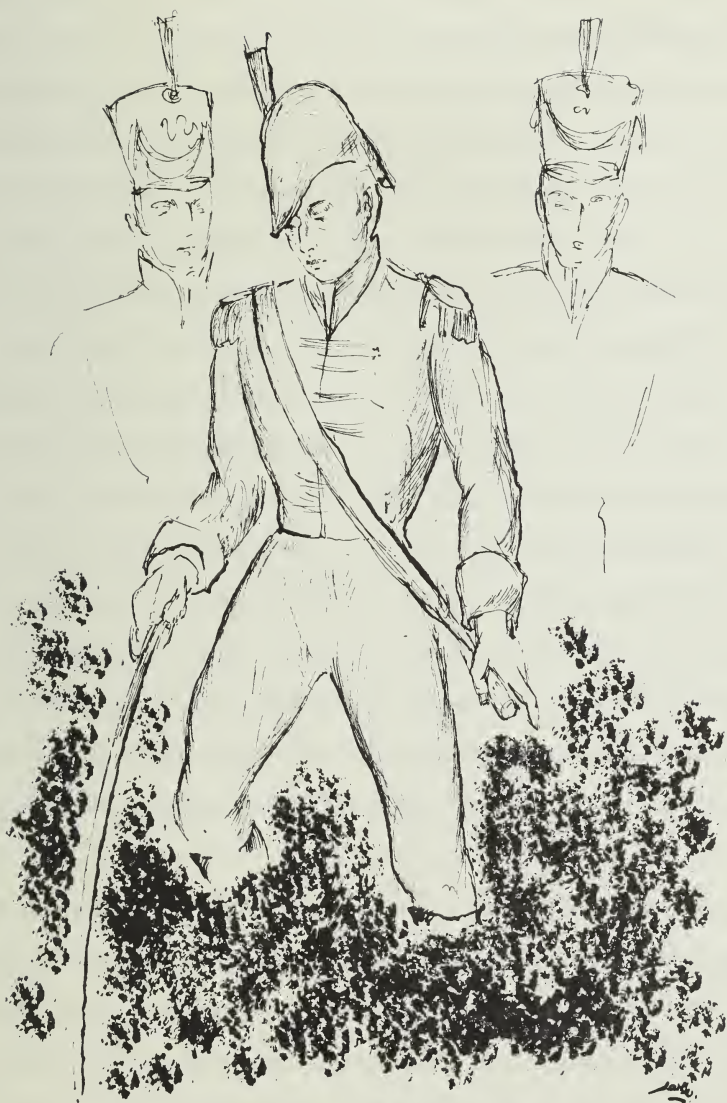


.. HE LEFT HIS FATHER'S HOUSE AS A VOLUNTEER ..

has (as his countenance indicates) a serious mind; yet no one admires a pleasant anecdote or an unaffected sally of wit more than he. With his friends he is affable and free from reserve. His manners are prepossessing, he dislikes ostentation, and he has never been heard to utter a word in praise of himself.

"In the autumn of 1811, the Battle of Tippecanoe was fought; it was the first opportunity offered for the display of his military talents. He embraced it with avidity--he left his father's house as a volunteer and was appointed aid-de-camp to General Harrison. On November 7, an attack was made on General Harrison's troops; the enemy were repulsed with valor, and during the engagement young Croghan evinced great courage, activity, and military skill. His services were acknowledged by all; he exhibited such proofs of genius for war that many of his companions-in-arms remarked that 'he was born a soldier.' A cant phrase among the troops was 'to do a main business'; during the battle, Croghan rode from post to post exciting the courage of the men by exclaiming, 'Now, my brave fellows, now is the time to do a main business!' On the return march of the troops following the battle, the army was frequently met by persons inquiring of the soldiers the fates of their children or friends. Among these was a very poor and aged man whose son had been slain in battle. Croghan learned of the old man's plight, observed his inability to perform much bodily labor, regularly made fires for him every morning, and supplied him with provisions, clothes, and money. Many accounts of similar acts of kindness are related by the soldiers and officers of this campaign.

"After the Battle of Tippecanoe his military ardor was even more increased, and, upon hearing that a speedy declaration of war was forthcoming, he expressed a desire to join the regular army. Recommendatory letters of the most flattering



..... HAVING WADED THROUGH MUD

kind were written by Generals Harrison and Boyd to the Secretary of War; at the commencement of hostilities against Great Britain, he was appointed a captain in the Seventeenth Regiment of Infantry. He was in command for some time at Clark Cantonment [Clarksville, Indiana], near the Falls of the Ohio; but after a brief period there he was ordered to march with his few regulars to the headquarters of the Northwestern Army at Detroit. His countenance beamed with delight upon receiving this order. Soon large bodies of militia and volunteers were marching to Detroit; but before they had proceeded far they heard of Hull's surrender.

"Shortly afterwards the command of the Northwestern Army was given to General Harrison. For a short time, Captain Croghan commanded Fort Defiance on the Maumee River; after the defeat of General Winchester, he was ordered to Fort Meigs. His conduct during the unforgettable siege of that fort was handsomely noted in General Harrison's official report, and afterwards he was promoted to a majority and stationed with his battalion at Upper Sandusky. Late one afternoon information reached him by express of an attack upon Fort Stephenson [Fremont]. The distance between the two places was thirty-six miles, and the road was extremely bad. Because of the pitch darkness he and his men were obliged to lie down in the road and wait for the return of light in order to avoid the risk of losing their way.

"He arrived at Fort Ball before sunrise the next morning, having waded waist deep through mud and mire and having been exposed to a heavy rain during the whole night. There he was informed that the report of an attack upon Fort Stephenson was unfounded; after remaining a few days, he proceeded to Fort Stephenson, after receiving orders to take command of that post. He arrived there about the

fifteenth of July.

"A few days later, Fort Meigs was besieged by large British and Indian forces. No doubt was entertained that the enemy would visit Fort Stephenson; accordingly, Major Croghan labored day and night to place the hastily built fort in a state of readiness. The necessity of cutting a ditch around the fort became apparent to him immediately. In order to foil the enemy if they should succeed in leaping the ditch, which was nine feet wide and six feet deep, he had large logs placed on the tops of the walls. The logs were adjusted so that a slight weight would cause them to fall from their position and crush to death all below. This improvement in the art of fortification took place only a few days before the attack. It is a novel idea and it originated with Croghan.

"A short time before the action, he wrote the following concise and impressive letter to a friend: 'The enemy are not far distant--I expect an attack--I will defend this post to the last extremity. I have just sent away the women and children with the sick of the garrison that I may be able to act without encumbrances. Be satisfied; I shall, I hope, do my duty. The example set me by my revolutionary kindred is before me; let me die rather than prove unworthy of their name.'

"In the afternoon of the first day of August, the attack upon Fort Stephenson was commenced. The particulars of that memorable and brilliant action can be found in General Harrison's official account of this period. A lucid statement of the honorable motives which influenced Colonel Croghan's conduct on that occasion is contained in an 'extract of a letter from himself to his friend in Seneca Town, dated August 27, 1813.' These accounts and other interesting particulars will be found in public prints issued between August 14 and September 16.

"Major Croghan's conduct after the battle was as noble as it had been during the hardest fighting. The wounded were treated by him with the greatest tenderness; with considerable peril, he gave them water by means of buckets let down by ropes to the outside of the pickets. During the night, when he could not safely open the fort, he had a tunnel dug under the wall and through it the wounded were conveyed into the fort.

"Major Croghan accompanied General Harrison to Malden, but, as the brigade to which he was attached was stationed there, he did not participate in the Battle of the Thames. He is remarkable as a disciplinarian, and his orders are given with more promptness, precision, and energy than are usually found in the orders of older and more experienced commanders."

I have appended the following extract of a letter written by one of Colonel Croghan's fellow students and fellow soldiers. It will throw additional light on the military character of that distinguished young officer.

Lieutenant Colonel George Croghan is a native of Kentucky; he is the second son of Major William Croghan of near Louisville. He is the nephew of the gallant hero and accomplished general, George Rogers Clark, the Father of the Western Country, and of General William Clark, the present enterprising governor of the Missouri Territory. His father, a native of Ireland who early embarked to seek his fortune in America, was a distinguished officer in the War of the Revolution.

Lieutenant Colonel Croghan was born on November 15, 1791, and received all the advantages of education which the best grammar schools in Kentucky could afford; in his seventeenth year he commenced a scientific course at William and Mary College in Virginia. In school and college he was known for his manliness of



..THE WOUNDED WERE TREATED BY HIM WITH THE GREATEST TENDERNESS..

character, his elevation of sentiment, and his strength of intellect; all these virtues were connected with a high and persevering ambition.

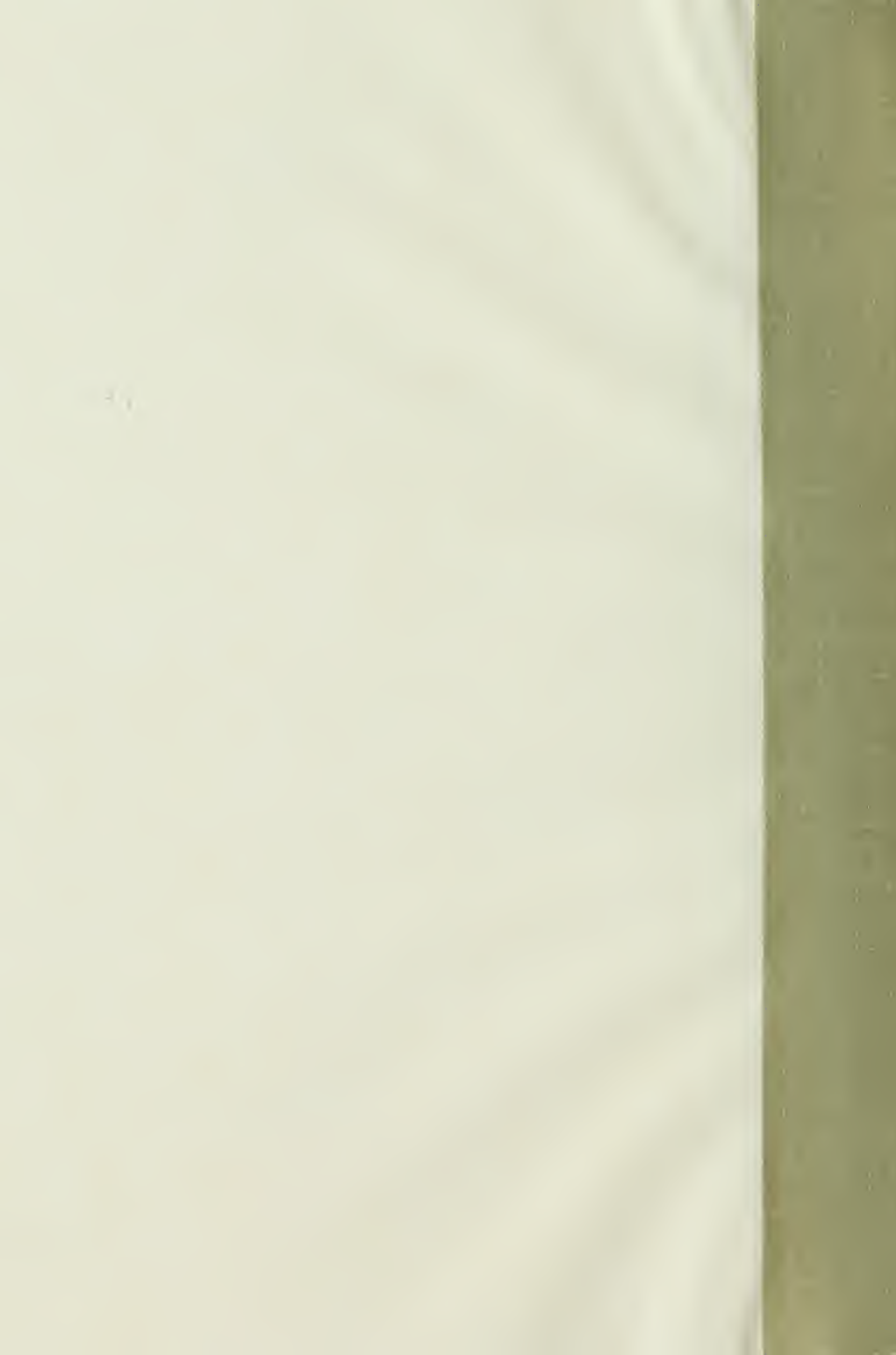
In July, 1810, he graduated at William and Mary College, and soon afterwards he commenced the study of law. He continued to visit that institution until the fall of 1811, when he volunteered his services for a campaign up the Wabash. A short time before the action at Tippecanoe, he was appointed aid-de-camp in General Harrison's headquarters. Although in his situation he was unable to evince that activity which later distinguished him, he exhibited an undaunted soul in one of the most sanguinary conflicts of the present day and received the thanks of the commanding general.

In consequence of his services on the Wabash expedition, he was appointed a captain in the provisional army which was directed to be raised and organized in the spring of 1812. In August of that year he marched with General Winchester's Kentucky detachment, which was to relieve General Hull in Canada. In the movements of that gallant but unfortunate little army, the caution, zeal, and military capacity of Captain Croghan were conspicuous. Both before and after the attack on Fort Wayne, the ground occupied by Captain Croghan was easily noticed because of the judicious fortifications erected in his areas. On the march of the army toward Detroit, he was entrusted with the command of Fort Defiance, at the junction of the Auglaize and Maumee rivers. There he manifested his usual excellent military arrangements. After the defeat at Raisin River, he joined General Harrison at Maumee Rapids before the erection of Fort Meigs.

It is a credit to the discernment of General Harrison that he relied with the utmost confidence on Captain Croghan's judicious defenses during the difficult siege

of Fort Meigs by the British. In a sortie under the gallant Colonel Millar on May 5, the companies led by Captains Croghan, Laghan, and Bradford were given the task of storming the British batteries. These positions were defended by an English force and a body of Indians; both were superior in number to the assailants. Here Captain Croghan's gallantry was again noticed in general orders.

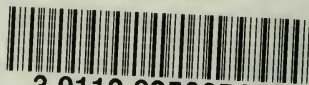
At a very critical period in the last campaign of 1813, young Croghan, now a major, was appointed to the command of Fort Stephenson, at Lower Sandusky. The official documents of the time and the applause of a grateful country are the most honorable commentaries available concerning his conduct in the defense of that post. The entire campaign was changed from a defensive to an offensive operation. The eventual outcome of the war was very materially influenced by the achievements of that single battle. For his valor and good conduct on this occasion, Major Croghan was breveted a lieutenant colonel.



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